

THE DUTY OF THE PRESENT HOUR

NO. 1563

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“Break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till
He come and rain righteousness upon you.”
Hosea 10:12.*

“BREAK up your fallow ground.” Nature at its largest is but a small farm, and we had need to get a harvest out of every acre of it, for our needs are great. Have we left any part of our small allotment uncultivated? If so, it is time to look into the matter and see if we cannot improve this wasteful state of things. What part of our small allotment have we left fallow? We should think very poorly of a farmer who for many years allowed the best and the richest part of his farm to lie altogether neglected and untilled. An occasional fallow has its benefits in the world of nature, but if the proprietor of rich and fruitful land allowed the soil to continue fallow year after year we should judge him to be out of his wits. The wasted acres ought to be taken from him and given to another husbandman who would worthily cherish the generous fields and encourage them to yield their harvests.

Bad is the man who neglects to cultivate his farm, but what shall be said of the sluggard who fails to cultivate himself? If it be wrong to leave untended a part of our estate, how much worse must it be to disregard a portion of ourselves!

Now, there is a part of our nature which many allow to lie fallow. It is not often that they neglect the clay soil of their outward frame. They dress that field which is called *the body* with sufficient care, and truly I would not that they should be careless about it, for it is worthy to be kept in due order and culture. Albeit that it is a very secondary part of our nature, yet it is so interwoven with the higher that it is most important that the body should not be neglected. See you well to that field, and by temperance, cleanliness, and obedience to the rules of health, let it be as a garden. Though it be after all but dust and ashes, akin to the common earth around us, yet the body is honorable, and when grace has sanctified the soul the body becomes the temple of the Holy Ghost.

Few need to be exhorted to pay attention to their bodies. “What shall we eat? What shall we drink, and how shall we be clothed?” is a trinity of questions which the majority of mankind spend all their lives in answering. The fault is not that they care for the body, but that it takes an undue share of consideration, and usurps a higher place than it can claim.

There is a second field in man’s self-farm, and this is called *the mind*, or the soul, and there are many who neglect this. These do ill, for “that the soul be without knowledge, it is not good.” There should be for the mental powers instruction and discipline. We should seek to know, and learn to understand, for we are not as the brutes which perish, which know nothing beyond their daily wants, we have thought and judgment, and memory, and imagination, these all need to be trained and used. Let the mind be cultivated by all means, and yet I need not say much upon this, for “culture” has become a kind of watchword with certain professors of religion, and with supposed knowledge they are puffed up. They have enough thought for the mind, and they glory in the harvests which it yields of human knowledge and earthly learning.

The soul, in such cases seems to be well tilled, but *the spirit*, the highest nature of all—that with which we speak to God—is suffered to lie entirely fallow! The soil where true religion should flourish in the furrows is left by many to produce the deadly nightshade of superstition, the hemlock of error, or the thistle of doubt. Is it not so with some of you who listen to me at this hour? Your hearts, your innermost natures, have been neglected, and from the finest part of your being the Lord has derived neither rent nor

revenue. Your best acres lie fallow—fallow when you have good need to cultivate every inch of the ground.

Do you know what happens to a fallow field? how it becomes caked and baked hard as though it were a brick? All the pliable qualities seem to depart, and it hardens as it lies caked and unbroken, I mean, of course, if year succeed year, and the fallow remains untouched. And then the weeds! If a man will not sow wheat, he shall have a crop for all that, for the weeds will spring up, and they will seed themselves, and in due time the multiplication table will be worked out to a very wonderful extent, for these seeds, multiplying a hundred-fold, as evil usually does, will increase, and increase, and increase again till the fallow field shall become a wilderness of thorns and briars, and a thicket of dock, nettle, and thistle. If you do not cultivate your heart, Satan will cultivate it for you. If you bring no crop to God, the devil will be sure to reap a harvest.

I fear that I am speaking to some who have never thought about this. It has not occurred to them to consider themselves, and the reasons for which they have a being. There is one text which I should like to drop into your ear in the hope that it may drop down through your ear right into your heart, “The wicked shall be turned into hell.” “Oh,” you say, “that is not me.” No, I did not mean that for you, I have not finished the verse yet. This is the part for you—“and all the nations that forget God.” There are nations of them, so numerous are careless souls. What did they do? They did not do anything, they merely fell into a little matter of neglect, that is all. They forgot something, they forgot God.

If I had to tell you how we are to be saved I might take some time about it, but if you ask me how you are to be lost I will tell you in a minute. “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great a salvation?” Neglect destroys men. Only sit still and allow matters to take their course and your damnation is sure. If you wish to be ruined in your spiritual husbandry you need not sow thorns, you have only to leave your soul fallow and you will starve when the great harvest comes. Fallow ground in human nature naturally and of itself will work famine and bankruptcy for every man who lets it have its own way.

So my text begins right well by saying, “Break up your fallow ground.” Begin to look to what you have neglected. Take a survey of what has come already of your neglect. Contemplate what result will surely come of continued carelessness. God helping you, go into that field which is up to your knees with weeds, and look around it and say, “This must be cleared out. This must be got ready for plowing. We cannot have this sad waste any longer. We have not gone through this gate before, we have scarcely looked over the hedge, we have left the field entirely to itself, and everything cries out against our neglect.

“Now, by God’s grace, we will enter into it, and will clear all the rubbish away, and pray the eternal God to bring the great steam plow of His almighty grace and tear up the soil to the very bottom, and then to burn these weeds and make this ground fit to be sown, that it may bring forth a harvest to His praise.”

Leaving that first part of the text, I am going to dwell upon the second, “It is time to seek the LORD, till He come and rain righteousness upon you.”

I. First, here is A TIME MENTIONED.

When is it time to seek the Lord? I am not going to try to say anything fine, but something that will come home to each unconverted person. May the Holy Spirit help me in this attempt, and bless it to your souls. When is it time to seek the Lord?

Well, it is time *as soon as ever you know right from wrong*. Oh! it will be a thousand blessings to you, dear boy and girl, wherever you may be at this moment, and to you young people that are listening to me, if you are led to seek the Lord while yet you are little. While you are yet children may you become children of God. Before you are permitted to go into open sin may your hearts be opened to divine grace.

Some of us who were converted while we were children will praise God forever, not only for our conversion, but for our *early* conversion. I have often prayed, with much sweetness to my own soul, that prayer of David, “O God, you have taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared your wondrous works.” I look forward hopefully to the time when I shall add, “Now also when I am old and

grey-headed, O God, forsake me not." If you have had a man in your employ ever since he was a boy, you do not like to turn him off when he grows old, and our Lord never turns off His old servants. It is a surely prevalent plea with him, "You art my hope, O Lord GOD: you art my trust from my youth." It is time to seek the Lord as soon as we can seek anything, for to such seekers there is the special promise, "They that seek me early shall find me."

I found the Lord and joined His church when I was fifteen years old, and I feel it no small joy to say with Obadiah, "I, your servant fear the LORD from my youth." Early piety saves from much sin and sorrow, and is often followed by a blessed and useful life. My heart rejoices that He, who was Himself, "the holy child Jesus," suffers the little children to come unto Him. Blessed be the name of the Lord for young people brought to Christ. May it please the Lord to touch each young heart here at this time with this thought, "It is time for me to seek the Lord." Come, you lads and lasses, you boys and girls, and learn of Jesus while yet your life is in its dewiest hours.

But it is especially time to seek the Lord *when it is late in the day of life, and the shades of the eternal night are gathering*. If it is time when first the morning breaks, how much more solemnly it is time when the shadows lengthen! You cannot live long, dear friend, for age, I see, is telling upon your once stalwart form. In the order of nature you must soon be gone. You know that you have passed your threescore and ten, perhaps your fourscore years, and you are living now upon the special charity of God. You have run out your lease, and are now a daily tenant. Surely it is time for you to seek the Lord. You may be gone to the judgment and the irreversible sentence before another Sabbath comes round.

*"It may be no tomorrow
Shall dawn for you or me;
Why will you run the awful risk
Of all eternity?"*

Take heed to yourselves that you do not trifle on the verge of eternity. With one foot in the grave, oh, seek to have both feet on the Rock of Ages! Then you need not fear old age and its infirmities, or its closing hours. Jesus will cheer and comfort you, and your eventide shall only be the prelude of a blessed morning, a morning without clouds.

Dear friend, it must be time to seek the Lord when death already seeks you, and infirmity tells upon you. When they that look out of the windows begin to be darkened, it is time to look up to heaven. When the keepers of the house tremble, it is time to find a home in Jesus. When our grave is ready for us, it is time to be ready for judgment. When there are evident signs of an approaching end, it is time that you should end your ramblings, and seek the Lord.

What a mercy it is that the very wording of the text gives us encouragement! "It is time to seek the Lord"—then there still is time in which to seek the Lord. Then it is not over with me, even if I have long delayed. I may still come to Him. Yes, when you are nothing but a bag of bones, with a crown of grey hair, Christ will have you. When you can only totter on your staff, you may come to Jesus, and if you have grown so infirm that even your memory begins to fail you, and all your senses seem to be departing, yet He can give you a child's eye—the eye of faith, and a child's heart—the heart of love, and make you a new man in Christ Jesus.

I see a good many here who are aged, and I know many of them are my fathers in Christ, I speak not to them. But I see some who may, perhaps, be still, even though in advanced age, "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity." Oh! dear old friends, it is surely time that you should seek the Lord. You cannot dispute my plea. Do yield to it at once, and seek the Lord ere yet another grey hair falls to the ground.

There are special occasions in which *a divine call is made to men*. If you remember, we read just now the word of the Lord in which He says, "It is in my desire that I should chastise them," and this is said in connection with the words of our text, "It is time to seek the LORD."

Now, have any of you been under the chastising hand of God of late? Have you been sick? Do you come up to this house after a time of illness? Well, it is a choice mercy to be afflicted. Take care that you do not despise it. The Lord has not given you up it seems, for still He thinks it worth His while to put bit and bridle upon you. Waste not the opportunity which recovered health brings you, but hearken to the divine call. He smites you that you may run to Him to have the wound bound up.

Or is it, dear friends, that you have lately lost some of those who were dear to you? Are they in heaven? Are you not going there yourself? Then, God calls you by that baby that has been removed, by that godly mother or that Christian friend who has gone home. He calls you and He says, "It is time to seek the LORD." Or have you been losing property? Is trade very bad? Have you been out of work, and are you brought to poverty? Will not these whips touch you, and drive you to seek the Lord?

I sometimes think that I have good reason for trusting God because I have nothing else to trust in. And beyond a question *you* might use the same reasoning. Go to God, for everything else is going away from you. You will soon have nothing left. O man, make sure of your God! When a Christian is in abundance, he finds God in everything, and when a Christian is in poverty, then he finds everything in God. But you cannot do that, you cannot do that, for God is nothing to you. And where will you be when all is gone, and you have no God? when everything departs from you as "a dream when one awakes," and you wake up to find that you are "without God and without hope in the world"? Think upon this, I beseech you, and let it be a call from heaven to you. "Hear the rod, and him that has appointed it," and as the strokes fall upon you, and you smart beneath them, think that you hear each stripe say to you, "It is time to seek the LORD."

It will be wise for us to add, and for you to remember, that it is time to seek the Lord *before the chastisement comes*. Is it not a wise thing to escape, if we can, from these judgments, for though kindly meant, it were better if we did not render them necessary? Soul, do you want to be whipped to Christ? If God means to save you He will bring you by fire, and He will bring you through water, yea, He will break all your bones in the bringing, but bring you He will. Why necessitate the rougher means? "Be you not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose month must be held in with bit and bridle." Why need to be goaded like an ox, or driven with blows like the stubborn mule? Yield at once! Yield to softer pressure! Overcome gently, sweetly, by His love, yield yourself to seek the Lord, and begin to do under milder influences what I trust you will be made to do by some means or other.

Do you not know how the Lord says concerning His people, "I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love"? The deed can be done without much ado. As yet you have not lost your children, your trade is not bad, you are not in ill health, you have every mercy surrounding you, then let these cords of love draw you. Yield while God is beckoning in mercy, and speaking as a lover who woos the object of His choice. Come along with you, just as a little child does when a nurse holds out an apple, or when a mother puts out her hands, and with a smiling face says, "Come to me, my child." Hear you the still small voice telling you that in the midst of your prosperity and domestic happiness, it is time to seek the Lord.

Oh, if you shall have this silver blessing of earthly felicity, and the golden blessing of eternal love on top of it, how rich you will be! All that you have indeed, to this time, may be compared to so many ciphers set in a row. You have seen a child make them on a slate. They all come to nothing. But if your God comes and puts His glorious unity in front of them, oh, what riches you will have! Get your God, the sacred integer, to add real weight and value to all you have. It is but nought until He comes there. "It is time to seek the LORD."

Let me argue with any that have been living a life of sin, and have never come to Christ. Have you not had enough of it? May not the time past suffice you? When will you have eaten enough unsavory meat? What profit have you in it? What comfort has it brought you? What peace has it wrought? Can you live on the profit of it? Could you die with sin about you, and hope that it would make your pillow soft? You know that "the wages of sin is death," and for my part, I judge the work of sin to be little better than the wages of sin. Do you not think so? And do you not think that you have long enough run

risks with your soul, and more than sufficiently played an awful game of hazard with immortality and heaven and hell?

O sirs, have you not had enough of the unprofitable works of darkness, and have you not grieved the Spirit long enough? Have you not vexed the heart of Christ long enough? He has been knocking, knocking, knocking, knocking, till His head is wet with dew, and His locks with the drops of the night. Must He tarry longer still? Oh, if He means to save you according to His everlasting purpose, He will come into your heart's bedchamber if He wait till cock-crowing, but do not, I pray you, treat contemptuously your loving, tender, patient Lord. Can you make Him wait, even, for another moment? Surely, by the memories of His long-enduring love, it is time that you should seek His face. Here are some sweet words which I would fain put into your mouths—

*“He has called, I cannot tarry,
I have heard His voice before;
I will leave these deadly slumbers,
And set open wide the door.*

*In the north blast He rebuked me,
And I knew the message well;
In the south wind now He whispers,
And no longer I'll rebel.*

*Even now again I hear Him,
Come, my Lord, and enter in,
How can I resist Thy knocking?
Come, and cover all my sin.”*

There are certain occasions in our lives upon which there seems to be a special mark set—a sort of *nota bene*—to make us note well that just now is a happy occasion. Tides to be taken at the flood do happen in men's lives, and it is well if they are turned to profitable use.

I think, dear friends, that it is time to seek the Lord very hopefully *when you are in a place where others have sought Him and found Him*. Your being in this house of prayer is a token for good. I can bear personal witness that there is hardly a seat in this Tabernacle on which, at some time or other, there has not sat a seeking sinner who has found the Savior. If we marked these seats with golden stars where souls were saved, you would see here many footprints of grace, holy places which angels look on with delight. You are found in a place where God is wont to do works of grace, it is a place whose name might be called, “JEHOVAH Shammah, the Lord is there.”

In this place the Lord has brought thousands, many thousands, to the feet of Jesus. And why not you? Why not you? The same Gospel is being preached to you, and by the same voice too, which God has made effectual to others, and with the same desire that it should be made effectual to you. The preacher can say truly that it is a desire which grows on him and absorbs the whole strength of his soul—the desire that you should be saved. “If by any means I might save some.” The place is hopeful, it is a very Bethesda, a house of mercy, a hospital of healing. Why should you not now seek and find the Savior?

Perhaps you are feeling in your heart at this moment a measure of thoughtfulness and softening, some drawings are upon you. This shows that it is time for you to seek the Lord.

*“E'en at this hour He calls you!
It is not yet too late;
He has not closed the day of grace,
He has not shut the gate.*

*He calls you! Hush! He calls you!
He would not have you go
Another step without Him,
Because He loves you so."*

Do not trifle with your heart when it begins to open. Oh, I have known some that have come to me and said, "We were once tender and hopeful, but now we are like the man in the iron cage, we cannot feel. We are almost past concern and conviction, and nothing awakens us."

Beloved hearer, if it is not so with you, you ought to be thankful, but do not rest in your tenderness, nor think that you are any better than others, bless the mercy which still waits for you, and pleads with you. When sailors go to sea they make use of every breeze. I know they would like a brisk trade-wind to carry them along from day to day, but if no such wind arises, they are glad of any favoring breeze. If there is only a puff, or a capful, they catch at it, and tack about to use every breath of it.

Now, though you may not, at this moment be feeling the secret power of the Holy Spirit to a high degree, yet, if conscience be only a little awakened, do not let it fall asleep. If the will is only a little swayed, do not try to stiffen it. If there is only a little desire to seek the Lord, take care of that desire, and let it become a hungering and a thirsting. You know how your servant does when the fire is almost out, how she kneels down and blows the coal, how she puts her hands together and gently breathes the dying flame to life again.

If you have a spark, may the Lord help you to blow it up, ay, and may His own living breath blow upon that little grace till it becomes the master influence of your nature, and like a consuming fire burns within your soul. These are favorable moments, moments to be used before they fly, when showers of grace are dropping upon you, and the ground is soft and ready for the holy seed. Take care that you use your opportunity well, for "it is time to seek the Lord."

And so it is, I think, *when the truth comes to you personally*, when you begin to feel, "There is something about the Gospel which is meant for me. I believe that God brought me to this Tabernacle tonight, and He has guided the minister in his text, and is helping him to bring the word home to my conscience. I thought he looked at me just now, I feel sure that he means me." Yes, you are quite right, he does mean you, and so does God mean you, and thus He calls you to Himself.

Arise, He calls you! Lame, blind, dead though you be, He calls you! Oh! yield to the sacred summons while now it comes out of the excellent majesty where sits His enthroned Son, for Jesus as well as the Father speaks to you. Come! Come at once! Come, you lingering, fainting one! Come, all you that labor and are heavy laden, for He will give you rest. "It is time to seek the LORD."

We have spoken enough about the time, if the Holy Spirit will but apply the warnings which we have uttered.

II. Let us now, in the second place, enlarge upon the peculiar work to which we are called at this time. Here is A SEARCH COMMENDED. "It is time to seek the LORD."

"Seek the Lord"? Why, He is here! "Seek the Lord"? He is everywhere present! "Seek the Lord"? He needs no seeking, for in Him we live and move. Yes, but do you not see that it does not refer so much to where *God* is, as to where *you* are? You have turned your back on Him, dear friend. If you are the person that I mean tonight, you have been forgetting Him, and so, because He has not been in your thoughts, you have, in a moral and spiritual sense, lost the Lord. He is everywhere except in your thoughts, and He is not to be sought for as though He were some hidden thing, to be discovered by search or ingenuity, but He is to be sought after because, as far as you are concerned, you have so forgotten Him as to have lost sight of Him. "Seek you the LORD."

I hear the earnest inquirer say, "It must mean that I am now to endeavor to realize that there is a God? And that He is very near me?" Yes. "And that I am speaking to Him?" Yes. "And that He calls to me, and says, 'Come to me; be reconciled'?" Yes. All this, and more, is to be your finding of God as really existent to you. Begin now to live, not as an atheist who is without God, but as a Christian, who

has God with him and has God within him. “Seek the LORD” means, then, that thought, and love, and desire should all come towards God, and realize Him, and so seek Him.

“Seek the Lord?” says one, “But I am sinful. If I come into His presence He will slay me, for He cannot look upon iniquity.” Then you must come and seek the Lord in the way in which it will be good for you to come near to Him, namely, through His dear Son. Because as a sinner you could not come to Him, or He to you, He has been pleased that His dear Son should take upon Himself the form of a servant, and be made in the likeness of sinful flesh, and “bear our sins in His own body on the tree.”

Now, if you will come to Christ, God is in Christ, and you will thus come to God. We may not come to God without preparation, but we may come to Christ without any preparation. We may come just as we are, at once, in all our dishabille, in all our nakedness, in all our filthiness. We shall never find God till we seek Him by the way of Jesus Christ.

My sinning brother, since the Lord has not hidden Himself in Christ, but has revealed Himself in Christ, and bids you see Him in His Son, I entreat you, attend to this word of the text, “It is time to seek the LORD.” Come and seek Him now by asking Him to wash you from your sin that you may find Him, to change your whole nature that you may find Him, to make you like Himself that you may dwell with Him, to help you to serve Him that you may live in the light of His countenance, to help you to cast off every false way, and to abound in His grace, that the rain of His righteousness may come upon you, and saturate your soul, so that you can never lose His presence again. “It is time to seek the LORD.”

My dear hearers, if any of you are not accustomed to hear the Gospel, but have been brought up in various forms of will-worship, let me beseech you not to think that it is of any use to seek a priest, or to seek a sacrament, or to seek anything but *the Lord*. To God Himself in Jesus Christ you must personally come, and the text says not, “It is time to be confirmed,” or “It is time to be baptized,” or “It is time to come to holy communion,” but it says, “It is time to seek the LORD.” That is the pith and core and marrow of your necessity, that your soul must seek after God, and your heart must come into the arms of God, as the prodigal son came into the arms of his father. He said, “I will arise, and go unto my—*priest*”? No, prodigal as he was, he was not so much a dupe. He said, “I will arise and go unto my *father*.” There was wisdom in going at once to headquarters, and seeking pardon from one who had the power to give it. The prodigal had fed swine, but he had not become one of the swine himself, or he might have gone to a father-confessor or a priest, being still a man, and having come to himself, he sought his father.

O Soul, I beseech you, seek no minister, seek to no outward form or ceremony, for in the Lord alone is your salvation. Every remedy short of divine aid will mock your misery. Time enough have you sought to earthly physicians, and you are nothing better, go then to JEHOVAH Rophi, the Lord that heals you, and you shall be made whole.

You will never be cured of your inward malady by sacraments, though you should devour a mountain of sacred bread and drink an Atlantic of consecrated wine. You will still be as lost as ever, though all saints and angels should come to your rescue, unless you do seek to God—to God in Christ Jesus. “It is time to seek the LORD.”

III. I close with a third point, upon which I will be very brief, there is A PERIOD SET.

How long are we to seek the Lord? “It is time to seek the LORD, *till He rain righteousness upon you.*”

I believe that very much seeking of the Lord is based on ignorance, that there are some who really set about seeking the Lord as if they could not find Him, and as if He were a long way off. This is corrected by the apostle in those memorable words, “Say not in your heart, Who shall ascend into heaven, or who shall descend into the depths? The word is nigh you.” How nigh you? “*In your mouth.*” That is how nigh it is. “In your mouth.” What hinders a man’s receiving that which is in his mouth? Swallow it, man. Swallow! That is all you have to do. It is in your mouth, nothing can be nearer, surely, than to have it in your mouth. Oh! if I were dying, and I had a live-long lozenge in my mouth, and I knew that it would save my life, do you think I would not suck it down? Ah! would I rest until it was

down? I should not care if a critic stood by and said, “You must not eat that lozenge. You are not worthy of it.” I have got it in my mouth, and your remonstrance comes too late, it is gliding down my throat. “Oh! but you must not swallow that lozenge, you are not fit to receive it.” I have got it, and I defy anyone to rob me of it, for down it goes. “But you must not, really, partake of it, it may not be meant for you. Perhaps you are not in the election of grace.” In vain your supposition. I have got it in my mouth, and if possession is nine points of the law it is all the points of the Gospel. I take it into my inward parts, and I will never part with it.

That is just the Gospel, and a sweet way of putting it—“The word is nigh you, even in your mouth, and in your heart.” “If you shall confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus, and shall believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved.” You have it again in our Lord’s words in His commission to His disciples, “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; he that believes not shall be damned.”

But, about this seeking. You see that there are some that forget that it is so very near them, and they go seeking, but if you seek the Lord, soul, whatever of ignorance mingles with the search, I exhort you to persevere in seeking the Lord *till He rain righteousness upon you*. Seek you the Lord, my dear hearer, till you find Him, never be satisfied with means, rest not till you get the end, find the Lord, or else go on seeking. Oh! stay not at heaven’s gate, ask for an abundant entrance. Be not content with knocking, but knock louder and yet louder, till the gate be opened. It is well to be near the kingdom, but it is an awful thing to be so near it and yet not to be in it. It is well to be persuaded to be a Christian, but a dreadful thing to be almost persuaded and then to stop in an undecided condition.

“Well,” say you, “but I may, perhaps, wait long, I have waited long already, and I am weary.” Suppose it to be so, is it not worth waiting for? But I tell you, your waiting is very much through your own ignorance. As I have already said, the word is nigh you, and you may have it tonight, even now you may have it, for it is in your mouth. If those poor blind eyes are delivered from the scales that hide a present Savior, e’en now, at this moment, you may give that look of which we sing—

*“There is life for a look at the Crucified One;
There is life at this moment for thee;
Then look, sinner—look unto Him, and be saved—
Unto Him who was nail’d to the tree.”*

Yet, if you do not understand it, cease not to seek that light may come. Pardon will pay you abundantly when it comes. You say, “I have been pleading for months.” Then, do not waste all that you have done, I pray you. Come and close with Christ, and get now the answer to all those prayers. Think of Columbus, within three days of America, that wondrous land in which he believed. He saw few signs of it—here and there a bit of seaweed—some little tokens that there might be land ahead, and the mariners declared that they would sail no farther upon that mysterious sea. Suppose that, within three days of the shore, Columbus had turned back, then he would have lost all his pains for lack of a few hours perseverance.

And you, tonight, perhaps, within half-an-hour of joy unspeakable—you, within the next ten minutes able to rejoice in Christ and find present salvation—will you now start back? No, by the Eternal Godhead, push you on! O Spirit of the living God, push the sinner on, and lead him now to say, “If I perish, I will perish pleading for mercy, and hoping in the grace of God by Jesus Christ.” You cannot and you shall not perish so.

“It is time to seek the LORD, till he rain righteousness upon you.” That is how long you have to seek Him. I will give you a picture, and with that conclude. You know the story of Elijah when the heavens had long been deaf, a bronze concave that mocked the desires of men. He went up to the top of Carmel, and he began to pray. With groans and cries and tears, with his head between his knees, he used language which only God heard, but it was mighty pleading. Then he said to his servant, “Go up now,

look toward the sea,” and Gehazi went up, and looked toward the sea, he gazed down there along the sea-line, and up there above the Lebanon, and then he cast a wistful look around, and came back, and said, “There is nothing.” The prophet, while his servant had gone, had been crying more importunately. He had been pouring out his soul to its very depths before God, saying, “I will not let you go except you bless this thirsty land.”

A second time He said to Gehazi, “Go again!” I think I see Gehazi going and looking, but he perceives nothing. “Master,” he said, “there is nothing.” But the prophet had been praying still, and so he said, “Go,” a third time, and away went Gehazi, thinking it was a fool’s errand. He went and looked, and in a moment said, “There is nothing. I told you there was nothing.” But the prophet had still been praying while the servant went, and he said to Gehazi, “Go again” for the fourth time. “He felt as the Lord lives He must hear my prayer,” and he gave himself again to wrestling with his Lord.

Before the living God he knelt, and he felt that he could not rise until the promise and the covenant had been fulfilled. Here comes Gehazi back. He does not like his task at all. “Master,” he says, “I have been five times and there is nothing. Will you send me again?” “Go again, Gehazi, go again,” said Elijah. “Go again.” And Gehazi goes the sixth time. “Alas!” he says to himself, “I never went on such an idle set of errands before.” All along the Mediterranean Sea he looks, and looks, and looks again, and back he comes with the old tale, “There is nothing, there is nothing, there is nothing.”

But what says Elijah to him? “This last time while you have been gone, I have prevailed. I have believed that I have the petition which I asked, and I know I have it. Go, Gehazi, go and look. I said to you, go again seven times, so go and look again.” The weary servant is in no hurry to go. The longer he is about it, the more is the likelihood there will be of its coming to something. When he reaches Carmel’s top, and casts his eye over the sky, there is a little fleece of cloud, but it is such a tiny flake that it is not bigger than a man’s hand. What is that to the sky? What rain can come out of a morsel of cloud to be measured by a span? He comes back and he declares, “Behold, there arises a little cloud out of the sea, like a man’s hand.”

Up rises the prophet, and wraps his mantle about him. The rain is coming, and he sends Gehazi in haste down to Ahab, to warn him against the nearing deluge, saying, “Prepare your chariot and get you down, that the rain stop you not.” Nobody could hear it, but Elijah had marvelous ears as he had a marvelous voice with God. He runs before Ahab’s chariot in sacred exhilaration of delight. The heavens are already beginning to turn to blackness, and the first big drops are falling. Elijah has prevailed.

Now, get to your chambers tonight—you that have not found the Lord, and come not forth till you have found Him, and He has given you grace as a mighty shower. If, by the morning light, there be but a little hope, and though you can only say, “God, be merciful to me a sinner,” keep the watches and continue the prayer. O soul, though you can only cry, “Lord, I believe, help you my unbelief,” yet watch on, and seek on, for the Lord will rain righteousness upon you. A deluge of mercy shall descend, and your heart shall rejoice, for this is His own promise, “When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue fails for thirst, I the Lord will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them.” So be it unto you. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—HOSEA 10

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—1030, 520, 449

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